

**TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM
CONFERENCE CALL NOTES
November 12, 2003
CORPS OF ENGINEERS NORTHWESTERN DIVISION OFFICES – CUSTOM
HOUSE
PORTLAND, OREGON**

Facilitator: Robin Harkless

The following is a summary of the process discussion between members of the Technical Management Team on 11/12/03. The notes are not intended to be a verbatim account of the meeting nor do they serve as the official “record”. They are intended to highlight discussion points, decisions, and actions.

Chum Operations Update:

TMT members revisited chum operations at the Bonneville tailwater, which was operating at an 11.2-11.5’ range following discussions and a TMT recommendation at the November 5th TMT meeting. Ron Boyce, Oregon, presented information from surveys that were done on Friday (11/7) and yesterday (11/11) at the Ives Island complex. 33 chum were observed in the area on Friday. 156 live chum, including 41 redds, were observed yesterday. Ron pointed out that the pattern looks similar to last year, during which the numbers increased dramatically over the next few days. Therefore, the Salmon Managers requested that the tailwater be increased to a range of 11.3-11.7’ at Bonneville, as soon as possible. Comments were offered from TMT members:

- Kyle Martin, CRITFC, offered his forecast for the Portland area that shows an increase in precipitation over the weekend.
- Dave Wills, USFWS, said that there is still a desire to meet the request expressed in SOR 2003-15 for 11.5’ minimum tailwater for Hamilton Creek.
- John Wellschlager, BPA, offered an alternative operation: raise the tailwater by 1/10’ on Friday, then another 1/10’ on Monday to allow time for the chum to arrive.
- Ron Boyce, Oregon, noted that the request for 11.5’ is consistent with the BiOp – which states that the operation should occur in the first week of November. He expressed a preference for the 11.3-11.7’ sooner than later.
- Cindy Henriksen, COE, reported that the overall day average flow has been slightly down for various reasons including below average precipitation and low load demands. There is a concern that the overall low flows may impact spring operations, and the COE would like to make ‘best use of a finite resource’.
- Paul Wagner, NOAA, said that the current request and the direction that TMT is heading for operations are consistent with the BiOp.

ACTION: TMT agreed to recommend an 11.3-11.6’ operation at the Bonneville tailrace beginning tomorrow, November 13th, at 7 am. The Action Agencies will monitor conditions and if there is an increase in precipitation, will increase the tailwater range to 11.3-11.7’. An email will be sent out to TMT by 2:00 pm on Monday, November 16th, notifying TMT whether the increase occurred or not, and why. TMT will revisit chum operations at their next regularly scheduled meeting, Wednesday November 19th.

1. Greeting and Introductions

The November 12 Technical Management Team conference call was chaired by Cindy Henriksen of the Corps and facilitated by Robin Harkless. The following is a distillation, not a verbatim transcript, of items discussed at the meeting and actions taken. Anyone with questions or comments about these minutes should call Henriksen at 503/808-3945.

Herkless reminded the group that chum operations were discussed at last week's regular TMT post-season review. We decided that, if information from subsequent chum surveys warranted, we would re-convene today to discuss the chum operation, Harkless said. At that meeting, we also asked BPA if they could increase the tailwater elevation to the 11.3-11.7-foot range, said David Wills; John Wellschlager agreed to check on that.

Ron Boyce said that, during yesterday's survey, field crews found 156 live adult chum and 41 redds on the spawning ground, as well as 204 live adult chinook and 83 redds. Both represent a big jump from the numbers seen during last week's surveys, Boyce said. In response to a question from Scott Bettin, Boyce said the numbers from the most recent Greys River survey are available via the Fish Passage Center homepage. Paul Wagner said the most recent number he had seen was 2,100 spawners in the Greys River, much higher than the number seen on this date in 2002.

Boyce said the chum numbers this year are tracking last year's trend fairly closely; he asked that the action agencies implement the requested 11.3-11.7-foot Bonneville tailwater operating range immediately. In response to a question from Henriksen, Wills said there is no access to the creeks as yet; however, if Bonneville tailwater elevation is increased to 11.5 feet creek access will likely be possible. Kyle Martin noted that heavy rain is expected this weekend and early next week, so local flows will likely be on the rise. Wills added that the State of Washington has requested a Bonneville tailwater elevation of 11.5 feet to support its Duncan Creek project.

The bottom line is that we're now there, in terms of chum numbers on the spawning ground, said Boyce – the salmon managers would like to see the requested chum operation begin as soon as possible. Wellschlager agreed that the chum have indeed begun to arrive, and said Bonneville is agreeable to increasing the Bonneville tailwater elevation. He said it would be helpful if the action agencies could have a couple of days to set the river up, because it takes a couple of days to get the water from Grand Coulee to Bonneville. He suggested that the minimum Bonneville tailwater elevation be increased by a tenth of a foot on Friday, and another tenth of a foot on Monday. Boyce replied that the water is there now, and it is simply a matter of shaping flows to benefit chum spawning. Bettin disagreed with this assessment.

Henriksen noted that day-average flows at Bonneville have fallen to about 120 Kcfs. She said that, while rain is forecast in the Portland area, that forecast does not

necessarily extend to the east side of the Cascades, where the storage projects are located. We are concerned that we do not have the storage to support this operation for an extended period, she said; it is still too early to say what kind of a water year this is shaping up to be. We're trying to make the best use of a finite resource, she said.

There are no surprises here, said Boyce; the fish are here now, and they need the water. What is the actual routing time from Grand Coulee to Bonneville? he asked. Twenty-four hours, Bettin replied. Boyce requested that the action agencies implement the requested 11.3-11.7-foot Bonneville tailwater operating range beginning tomorrow, noting that that is what the fish need. In response to a question, Wagner said the operational direction that has been proposed is consistent with the BiOp. We have been in a dry period, Wagner said; however, the fish are now arriving.

So what is the actual operating range to be implemented? Harkless asked. Bonneville is comfortable with a range of 11.3-11.6 feet, Wellschlager replied. And if the forecast is correct, and significant rain bumps up local flows? Boyce asked. Then Bonneville flows will be higher, Bettin replied.

What's different about this year? Boyce asked – why aren't the usual chum flows being provided? Are we habitat-limited, at this point? Bettin asked. Probably not, Boyce replied, but we may be hydraulically-limited, in terms of conditions on the spawning grounds. Can we go to a tighter operating range, 11.4-11.6 feet? he asked. No, Bettin replied.

We're trying to make the best use of the resource while meeting the needs of chum as well, said Wellschlager. Hopefully the rains will materialize, and we'll be able to adjust the top end of the operating range a little, and make everyone happy, he said. We definitely understand what you're trying to get to, Bettin said; he suggested that the action agencies discuss the chum operation on Monday and email their operational decision to the rest of the TMT. The TMT will then re-convene next Wednesday, he said. The more that we're at the 11.5-11.6-foot level, the better, from both Oregon's and Washington's perspective, Boyce said. Understood, Bettin replied.

Are you expecting a good return of chum this year? Wellschlager asked. Of chum and of chinook as well, Boyce replied.

After a few minutes of additional discussion, Bettin reiterated the action agencies' agreement to bump the Bonneville tailwater operating range up to 11.3-11.6 feet beginning tomorrow morning, November 13. What about nighttime flows? Boyce asked. Right now nighttime flows are low, Bettin replied; however, if we get the volume of rain Kyle is predicting, nighttime flows will have to increase at Bonneville. Is there any way to avoid or minimize that? Boyce asked. Not unless we get a lot of rain on the east side of the Cascades, Bettin replied.

With that, the conference call was adjourned. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle.